



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

October 23, 2007
FB07-035

NOAA Fisheries Service is Seeking Comments on a Proposed Rule to Rebuild Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) is seeking public comment on a proposed rule that would implement measures to rebuild red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. These measures are outlined in the joint Amendment 27 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico and Amendment 14 to the FMP for the Shrimp Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico (Amendment 27/14). The proposed rule was published in the *Federal Register* on October 23, 2007, with the comment period ending December 7, 2007.

Purpose of the Proposed Rule

The proposed rule would reduce the red snapper catch, bycatch, and discard mortality in the directed commercial and recreational fisheries, and the shrimp fishery to end red snapper overfishing and rebuild the stock. A March 2007 court ruling on legal challenges to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) existing red snapper rebuilding plan requires the plan be revised by December 12, 2007. Revision to the plan must ensure a reasonable probability of ending overfishing by 2010 and rebuilding the stock by 2032.

Elements of the Proposed Rule

- Fishing mortality on red snapper would be reduced through a reduced commercial quota of 2.55 million pounds and a reduced recreational quota of 2.45 million pounds.
- Discard mortality in the directed fisheries would be reduced by:
 - Reducing the commercial minimum size limit to 13 inches total length.
 - Requiring the use of venting tools, dehooking devices, and non-stainless steel circle hooks (when using natural baits) for all reef fish fishery sectors.
- Shrimp effort, and the associated bycatch discard mortality of juvenile red snapper, would be controlled through time-area closures to reduce red

snapper mortality 74 percent from the 2001-2003 time period. This reduction could be modified in the future as red snapper rebuild.

- The recreational harvest would be constrained to the new quota by reducing the recreational bag limit from four fish to two fish, setting the bag limit for captains and crews of for-hire vessels at zero, and shortening the recreational fishing season to June 1-September 30. The 16-inch total length minimum size limit for recreational fishermen would stay the same.

NOAA Fisheries Service disapproved the proposed action in Amendment 27/14 that would assume recreational fishing effort and landings have declined 10 percent below average since the 2005 hurricane season and will remain at that level indefinitely. As a result, the length of the recreational fishing season supported by the red snapper recreational bag limit and minimum size limit is 122 days (June 1- September 30), rather than 154 days (May 15-October 15) as proposed by the Council. NOAA Fisheries Service determined the assumption of a 10 percent reduction was not based on the best available scientific information.

How to Submit Public Comments

DATES: Written comments must be received no later than 5 p.m., Eastern time, on December 7, 2007.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by 0648-AT87, by any one of the following methods:

- **Electronic Submissions:** Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal <http://www.regulations.gov>. To find the rule, select Document ID under Optional Step 4 and enter NOAA-NMFS-2007-0749 in the adjacent box. Click submit to find the proposed rule. Follow instructions on how to submit comments for this proposed rule.

- Mail: Peter Hood
NOAA Fisheries Service
Southeast Regional Office
Sustainable Fisheries Division
263 13th Avenue South
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- Fax: 727-824-5308, Attention: Peter Hood

Instructions: All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted to <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All Personal Identifying Information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit Confidential Business Information or otherwise sensitive or protected information.

NMFS will accept anonymous comments. Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only. Copies of joint Amendment 27/14 and supporting documents are also posted with the proposed rule. These can be obtained from the Federal eRulemaking Portal <http://www.regulations.gov> following the instructions provided above to find the proposed rule for comments.

The proposed rule is also available via the Internet at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html> (do an advanced search under proposed rules for “page 59989”). Printed or electronic copies of the rule and joint Amendment 27/14 can be obtained from the Southeast Regional Office by contacting Peter Hood (see address above).

Comments must be received by December 7, 2007, to be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service in its decision on the final rule. All comments received by NOAA Fisheries Service specific to the proposed rule will be addressed in the final rule.

This bulletin provides only a summary of the information pertinent to the rule. Any discrepancies between this bulletin and the rule as published in the *Federal Register* will be resolved in favor of the *Federal Register*.

How Can We Improve These Fishery Bulletins?

If you have any suggestions on how we may improve the contents of future fishery bulletins please contact:

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